



Selmer cooperating with EPA investigation

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The Selmer Co. is under investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency for the ground-water contamination episode in the East Jackson Boulevard area.

"These people voluntarily came forward after we made requests to a half dozen sources," said Ken Theisen, senior on-scene coordinator for the EPA, of Selmer. He indicated that Selmer officials told the EPA that chemicals may have been dumped at the site about "15 or 20 years ago." At that time, the property was owned by the C.G. Conn Co.

"Specifically, Selmer is one of the companies we have spoken to about being a possible source.

The locations where we have found contamination in wells have been down-gradient from their facilities," said Charles McKinley, EPA regional counsel. "Selmer did offer some information that has led them to allow sampling on their property to determine if something that was reported to have happened in the early 1970s did occur.

"From our perspective, there is reasonable basis for asserting liability," McKinley said. "Evidence is accumulative."

Homeowners in the Marshall Boulevard area discovered trichloroethylene contamination in 1985. That summer, the EPA sampled the area and discovered more than 200 homes with tainted water wells. The city and the EPA helped connect

most of those homes to the Elkhart Water Works.

Two other entities — Accra Pac and the estate of the late Warner Baker — are negotiating with the EPA to get the area cleaned up and to assume at least \$1.2 million that has already been spent in the area. The Accra Pac/Baker site on Industrial Parkway was the scene of an explosion that killed five people in January 1976. The EPA discovered 13 underground tanks containing several chemicals, included TCE, escaping into the surrounding soil and the ground water.

"We identified six different chemicals in at least two wells that can be fingerprinted back to the (Accra Pac) site," Theisen said. Those residential wells

were located on Superior Street directly north of the tank site.

The Selmer plant is located just south — and down-gradient — of the Los Angeles-Hollywood avenue area. It was built in 1965 and occupied by C.G. Conn until 1970. Selmer moved in two years later. EPA officials indicated that Selmer did not own the plant when the alleged chemical dumping occurred. McKinley said, "I have to say in fairness to Selmer that they have been very forthcoming. We would like to reward the good guys."

H.W. Petersen, president and chief executive officer of Selmer, said this morning that Selmer is "participating" in the search. "I don't think we're being investigated. I think the entire situation is being investigated by the

EPA," he said. "At this point there is no proof. There is no direct evidence that anything irregular has happened."

Theisen said the parties have been negotiating the cleanup with the EPA for the past "several months."

"They've got consultants hired," Theisen said. "They already submitted one work plan, but it didn't go deep enough. That's what we're negotiating right now, an expanded effort. We're expecting a plan of work from their consultants within the next week or two."

Residents and workers in the area can expect to see what Theisen called "an in-situ" cleanup. It would use a drill rig and a compressor to inject air into the tainted ground, forcing

up contaminated vapors, which would then be treated and released into the atmosphere.

"Once the drilling is done, there will be some pipes and compressors present," said Theisen. "It will be pretty low profile. What we're trying to determine right now is how far did the contaminated chemical migrate; how deep did they go."

Concerning this "full remediation" effort, Theisen added, "The ball is in their court right now."

By law when the Superfund reauthorization legislation was passed, the responsible parties would be liable to pay for the cleanup as well as reimbursing the EPA, state, city and homeowners for connecting to the city water system.

10/12/88
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